

WNBA Finals: Las Vegas vs. Phoenix

Wednesday, October 8, 2025

Phoenix Mercury

Nate Tibbetts

Game 3: Postgame

Aces 90, Mercury 88

Q. Nate, can you talk about the perseverance and staying with it the entire game to be able to put that run together in the fourth quarter?

NATE TIBBETTS: Yeah, I mean, we're not into moral victories. This is a game that we wanted to get, needed to get. But for us to compete the way that we did I think just shows the character of our team. It's the way we've fought all year. We got down 17 at one point. I don't know how many we were down in the fourth. Had a key player go down. We just kept fighting.

Put ourselves in a position to win against a really good team. Yeah, I'm proud of our group for not giving in, and that's what we expect on Friday, too. We're going to keep fighting. That's what this group is about.

Q. Nate, do you have an update on Satou and what happened on that play?

NATE TIBBETTS: Yeah, I haven't seen it yet, and I have not heard. She was not in the locker room when I just went in there and talked. I have not heard.

Q. Do you know if it was a head or concussion protocol? Is she going into concussion protocol?

NATE TIBBETTS: Like I said, I haven't heard yet.

Q. What do you think the problems that the Aces have continuously presented to you guys throughout this series, and as you said, not into moral victories, down 3-0. Where do you reach into your bag of tricks for Game 4?

NATE TIBBETTS: Yeah, I think you just look inside yourself and continue to compete. We've played them in two close games with 25 seconds, 40 seconds to go, it's been a one-point game in two of the games.



Obviously those are games you're in position to win. Besides Game 2, I think we've played them pretty solid. Obviously we had to come back tonight.

But we're facing a team that has been through this together. It's not a team that is just, like, figuring it out. They're a well-oiled machine, and all these situations they've been in together, they've won together, they've lost together. As hard as it is, that stuff matters. That stuff matters.

But I was, again, super proud of how we just kept fighting. This crowd was unbelievable once again and just gave us the energy to put us in position to -- right until the end.

Q. Pregame we talked with you a lot about defensively what needed to happen tonight. I'm curious how you assess the defense in both halves, especially giving up around 90 points once again.

NATE TIBBETTS: Yeah, I thought the second half, obviously, was our best defensive half of the series. I thought in the first half, we had some really good defensive possessions, but we just didn't finish them with the rebound. We talked about second-chance points. I liked our focus coming out defensively, but there was a couple loose balls they picked up, hit some threes. They had nine threes in the first half. Seven of them were uncontested. In the second half we made a stand, and we picked it up.

It looked like a lot more of the defense that we've been playing all year.

Q. Obviously Kahleah got loose there in the fourth quarter, but what do you think you saw in general that led to such a comeback during that time?

NATE TIBBETTS: Just our competitive spirit, our want-to, never giving up. We've been in that situation before in the Playoffs and fought back. Being down 2-0 I think there's a lot of teams that might have not continued to compete at the level that we did. I thought DB had an awesome stretch at that time, Kahleah obviously. You need players to step up. Those two did a hell of a job, and like I said, we gave ourselves a chance.



Q. What's been the most difficult part of the way they've defended you game to game to game that you guys have maybe had some problems solving?

NATE TIBBETTS: I don't think there's been a -- Game 1 obviously the zone bothered us in the second half. Kind of just stalled us out a little bit.

I thought tonight, again, we're better when we get stops. We haven't been able to play in transition as much. They're scoring. We're taking the ball out. Obviously that affects our transition and some of our open threes.

They've done a good job. The switching has given us problems at times. I thought tonight we did throw it in the post a little bit more and it created a problem for them.

Q. What have you seen from DeWanna Bonner tonight? She had a double-double of 25 points and 10 rebounds off the bench.

NATE TIBBETTS: DB was fantastic the whole night. She's been battling some kind of sickness. We changed the matchups, she went to A'ja. I thought she competed at a high level.

Then offensively she was just fearless. She made big shots when we needed them. She got downhill. She got to the free-throw line. That's why we went and got her for these type of games.

Q. You talked about DeWanna being on A'ja. Obviously you had to move Alyssa around. When you look at the rest of the defense, how did you feel about the gap defense you all were able to show today?

NATE TIBBETTS: Yeah, I liked our adjustments, I really did. I thought we had more energy and force on the ball.

Again, I'll have to look, but I felt like some of their looks in the first half, the open ones at least, came off of second chance or loose ball type stuff. Obviously Jewell coming in and hitting four threes in the first is tough to overcome. But for us to not hang our head, cut it to three at the end of the first was really important.

Then yeah, defensively in the second half we did a lot better job. I thought in the third we were getting stops and we had about four or five straight possessions offensively where we could have cut it.

Those are big minutes, especially when you're playing down a little bit, you've got to cut that lead.

Q. After Game 1, you talked about regretting not calling a time-out in that final possession. I guess the possession that ended with AT taking a layup with about 20 seconds to go, do you regret not calling a time-out there?

NATE TIBBETTS: I thought we had had about three good possessions. Gustafson was in the game and I didn't want to call a time-out at that time to have them sub her out.

So we had ran a play three or four times and then gotten some good looks off of that, so that was kind of the mentality. Those are always questions that you ask yourself. I feel good about the look that we got and not allowing them to make a defensive substitution because Gustafson was the person that we were trying to attack.

Q. We know you guys for your physicality very well. How did you feel like you guys tried to start with the physicality but then find the balance of the legal limit throughout the game that you guys were allotted, without getting fined, of course, please.

NATE TIBBETTS: Yeah, we're a competitive group. We're physical. I've felt like AT has gotten downhill and gotten to the paint quite a few times and not gotten rewarded. But unfortunately this is what it is. You've just got to keep battling. You'd love to have consistency. But it's not always the case.

Q. Kah struggled to get established offensively throughout the first three quarters. What did the Aces do to disrupt her rhythm?

NATE TIBBETTS: Yeah, they came out in a semi zone or zone again, and it was almost like they played a box-and-one against her early. I'm not sure. I'll have to look at it. But they did a good job of being really aggressive against her.

But the great thing about Kah, she just keeps playing. She's had some good first halves against them, and they've done a better job of guarding her in the second half. Obviously they did a good job in the first half tonight, but she got it going in the fourth. We're going to need that from her moving forward.

Q. Going into Friday night, obviously this game is so fresh, but what are the biggest things you want to see from your team, both in terms of on-the-court X's and O's but also the intangibles too?

NATE TIBBETTS: You know, I don't know how many teams have come down from 0-3. Not many, so I'm not going to sugarcoat that. We've got a tough road ahead,



but we've got to take it one game at a time.

Like I said, this group has been a group that has continued to compete at a high level. We're going to expect that. We're in front of our fans. We've got a certain level of pride that we're going to continue to keep fighting.

Q. Nate, when you're down 17 points, what changes? The whole current of the game completely switched to your side.

NATE TIBBETTS: I wish I had an answer for that. Confidence, competitive spirit, shot-making. All those things matter. Belief.

Q. Just going back to Sabally, when she came off the court did you notice what she was favoring?

NATE TIBBETTS: I would guess she got hit in the face or the head.

Q. Looking at the box score here, I see that the Aces had 92 percent on their free throws compared to your team's 74.2 percent. How much from your perspective are these free throws kind of affecting just the overall game, and how important are they going to be in Game 4 on Friday?

NATE TIBBETTS: Yeah, I mean, obviously free throws are important. We did a great job of getting to the line. Typically we're a pretty good free-throw shooting team, so I have confidence that our group will step up and knock them down.

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